

Cancellation of Javed Akhtar event sparks row in Bengal

Source - TH

The core issue is the **cancellation of a state-sponsored cultural event (featuring Javed Akhtar) by the West Bengal Urdu Academy**, allegedly under pressure from religious groups. This incident highlights a critical tension between:

1. **Freedom of Expression & Secularism:** Civil rights groups (like APDR) accuse the state government of betraying its constitutional duty to uphold secularism and free speech by capitulating to the demands of fundamentalist forces. They see it as a politically motivated move to appease a specific voter bloc ahead of elections.
2. **Communal Harmony & Sentiments:** The opposing groups (like Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind) argue that the cancellation was necessary to prevent potential communal disharmony, claiming that the speaker had a history of making comments that insult religious sentiments.

The event's postponement is thus not just a administrative decision but a **symbol of the state's dilemma in balancing ideological principles with pragmatic political and social considerations.**

Sociological analysis

1. Core Theoretical Perspectives(thinkers)

- **Durkheim (Collective Conscience):** Religion acts as moral glue; dissenting voices seen as threats to cohesion.
- **Weber (Authority):** Contest between **rational-legal (state/civil rights)** and **traditional authority (religious leadership)**.
- **Parsons (Functionalism):** State's priority = equilibrium → prevention of disorder > protection of rights.
- **Conflict Theory (Marx):** State actions shaped by **power struggles & electoral interests**.
- **Symbolic Interactionism:** Event becomes symbolic—
 - For civil groups: erosion of secularism.
 - For religious groups: defense of honor.
- **Public Sphere (Habermas):** Ideally a space of debate, but here curtailed by communal politics.

2. Politics and Society

- **Nation, Democracy & Citizenship:** Citizenship tension between **rights (free speech)** vs. **duties (public order)**.

- **Political Parties:** TMC's decision illustrates **vote-bank politics**—balancing ideology and pragmatism in an electoral democracy.
- **Social Movements:**
 - **APDR (rights-based):** Pushes for secular, constitutional values.
 - **Jamiat Ulema-e-Hind (identity-based):** Defends faith and collective honor.
- Illustrates how **movements exert pressure on the state**, shaping policy.

3. Religion & Society

- **Secularization Thesis Challenged:** Instead of religion retreating, religious groups actively shape public discourse and state policy.
- **Religious Fundamentalism:** Opposition to Javed Akhtar is rooted in defending sacred values, a bid to extend religious authority into cultural/public life.
- **Communalism:** A textbook case of **group mobilization against perceived external threat**, prioritizing religious over civic identity.
- **Pluralism & Tolerance:** Tests the **limits of tolerance in a plural society**—demands are not for coexistence but for silencing dissenting voices.

4. Social Change in Modern Society

- **Education & Social Change:** Urdu Academy, a cultural/educational body, becomes an arena of political-communal conflict → showing institutions are not neutral.
- **Media & Social Change:** Media reporting amplified tensions, while protests leveraged threat of unrest as bargaining power.

Paper 2: Indian Society & Institutions

1. Modernity & Social Change in India

- **Theoretical Perspectives Applied:** Functionalism, Conflict, Symbolic Interactionism explain how **modern democratic India manages contradictions between secular ideals and religious identities**.
- **Democracy & Institutions:** State institutions (like Urdu Academy, govt. machinery) reveal **fragility in protecting liberal rights under pressure**.
- **Political Parties & Pressure Groups:** Illustrates how **non-state actors influence electoral politics**, shaping state responses.

2. Indian Secularism

- **Principled Distance (Bhargava):** Indian secularism involves **contextual negotiation with religion**, not strict separation.
- Cancellation = state drifting from neutrality towards **appeasement politics**.

3. Communalism & Identity Politics

- Reflects how **communal sensitivities override universal rights**.
- **Vote-bank politics:** State seeks **short-term peace & electoral gain**, sacrificing secular ideals.

4. Social Movements in Modern India

- **Types of Movements:**
 - **Redemptive:** Religious groups aim for moral-cultural change → silence dissenters.
 - **Reformative:** APDR seeks partial reform → alignment of state policy with constitutional secularism.
- **Ideological Clash:** Secular liberalism vs. religious conservatism.

5. Civil Society & State

- **Role of Civil Society:** Civil society acts as a mediator between citizens and the state—pressuring the government to either uphold constitutional rights (APDR) or protect religious sentiments (Jamiat), thereby shaping the policy outcome.

6. Challenges of Social Transformation

- **Crisis of Institutional Order:** State appears unable/unwilling to uphold secular mandate → prioritizing peace over principle.
- **Violence Against Women (link to Taslima Nasreen):** Shows a broader pattern where dissenters, often women, face exile, threats, and suppression.
- **Problems of Religious Minorities:** Internal struggle within minority communities—between **liberal-progressive voices** and **orthodox-traditional leadership**.

7. Law, Social Control & Social Change

- **Law as Instrument:** Cancellation order reflects **political expediency**, not neutral application of law.
- **Social Control:** Justified as preventing disorder, but perceived as curtailing rights.